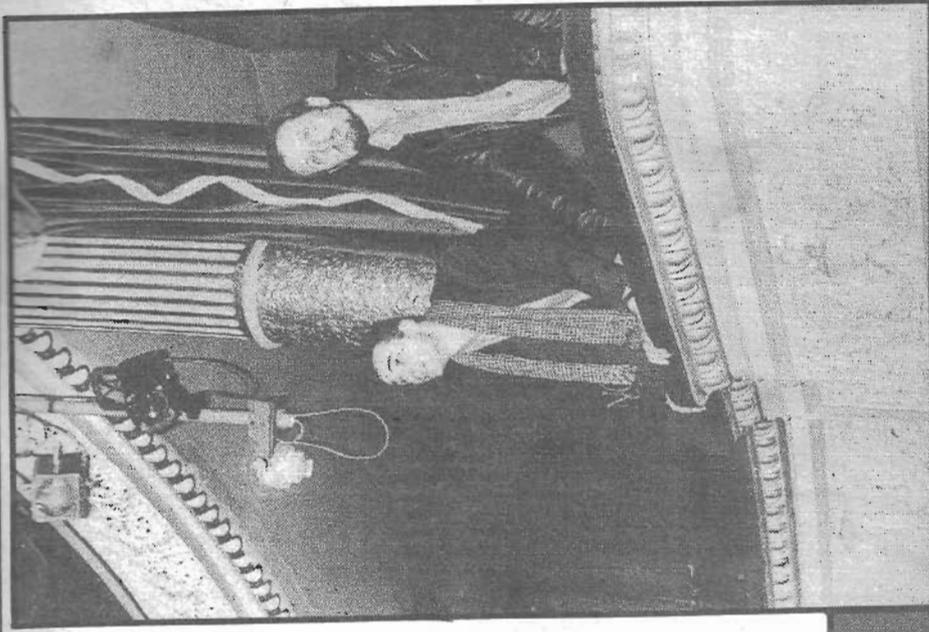


Curtain up on theatre's Grey Lady

THEY say she walks along the splendid galleries of the Victorian opera house.

At the Royal Theatre staff tell of a grey lady who glides along the corridors and wanders silently among the empty aisles. One dark evening we asked psychic Patrick Deadman to investigate...



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AT THE Royal Theatre the actors take a last bow as the final curtain falls. A packed audience shows its grateful appreciation in a riot of applause. As the last echo dies away the people make their way from the auditorium and spill out onto the streets.

It's 11.00pm on a Saturday night and inside the splendid Victorian opera house all is quiet. Upstairs in the galleries there is a deathly hush now as row upon row of vacant seats look out across the empty stage.

Though the audience has gone the atmosphere is electric. You can still feel the heat of several hundred people and if you stand long enough you can almost hear a ripple of applause of those who have been and gone during a hundred years of theatre history. But everything's quiet. There's nobody here now.

The dimmed stage lighting paints eerie shadows on the walls and plays strange tricks on those who stand long enough — especially if they've heard about the theatre ghost.

For decades staff at the theatre have been spooked by a mysterious grey lady who walks the narrow corridors and wanders through the empty aisles. Entire acting companies tell of a strange, unseen presence on stage and there are those who have actually seen the silent hooded figure.

Take Bryan Douglas, stage carpenter, then front of house manager at the Royal, he's seen the grey lady three times.

"I don't talk about it much, but I'm one of the few people who has seen the ghost. The first time I saw it I was sitting in the Green Room and saw someone going into my workshop on the floor above.

"In those days there wasn't much security



by **ANDY GOSS**

and it wasn't unusual for people to wander in. I dashed up the stairs and went into the workshop, but there was no-one there. At that time there wasn't any other way out and there simply hadn't been time for anyone to have come out and gone past the stairs.

"I didn't realise then that I had in fact seen a ghost," said Bryan.

"Another occasion was when I had just been outside the stage door to put something in the car and I saw this person up Swan Street cross the road and go to the stage door. It was dusk and I expected to see the door open and the light go on. But it didn't and this person just literally walked straight through the stage door.

"I followed it quickly and as I opened the stage door this figure was going into my workshop — through a solid door. It was wearing more of a cloak than a coat; a greyish, blue cloak with a hood,

Is the Grey Lady real? (Top) Patrick Deadman (right) and Andy investigate

but so real. There was no sort of mistiness about it, which is why the first time I saw it I thought it was a real person.

"I followed it into the workshop, but when I opened the door there was nothing there. But when you see something you take for a solid figure walk through a wooden door right in front of your eyes, it makes you think."

SO HERE we were in the middle of the night, gazing down at the empty stage from the balcony. I turned to my companion and noted uneasily that he'd closed his eyes in a bid to tune into any ghostly vibrations.

This was Patrick Deadman, leading Midlands' psychic and ghost hunter extraordinaire. I went for my note pad with trembling fingers. "You picking anything up," I said in a whisper.

He opened his eyes and looked at me. "Not a thing, there's nothing here. The atmosphere is marvellous, it really is." I could have hugged him.

But we had only just arrived and my jubilation was, admittedly, a little premature. After all, we still had a tour of the entire theatre to go before we could expose with any confidence the real truths about the elusive grey lady.



Creeping through the shadows we searched the auditorium, the stage, the workshop — every nook and cranny of the Victorian theatre — but we found nothing.

But just as I began to relax something remarkable happened. Having made a comprehensive sweep of the theatre in search of our ghost we made our way to the spot where the sightings had taken place — what used to be the stage carpenter's workshop.

There's no original brickwork there now, just a breeze block wall. Patrick pauses, rooted to the spot.

"There's something here," he says, forcing the words out with difficulty.

He stands gazing at the wall, eyes closed, concentrating. Hell, I think, when I thought it was safe!

"Yes, she was here," he says. "I'm going back a long way now. There used to be a well here; a garden; lots of open space.

He turns towards me: "But I'm going back a long way now, perhaps before the middle ages. I can smell burning, like the forging of iron; a blacksmiths.

"She would have lived here then; a lady of perhaps 40 to 45, but not old, or crooked. This lady is slim and elegant, quite tall for a woman.

"But she is very sad and lonely. She lost her husband, perhaps through war, or disease; it's so far back I really can't tell. She comes back here because it's somewhere she loved. And this lady is a conscious spirit with the ability to exist in her own time and suddenly to surface in ours.

"That's all I can tell you; she won't come. I can't get anything else." He pauses, breathing heavily, eyes still closed. "And there's a burial ground of some sort here. I don't know if you knew that. And further back still, some Roman buildings. It would be interesting to check. No, that's all I can get, she's no longer here."

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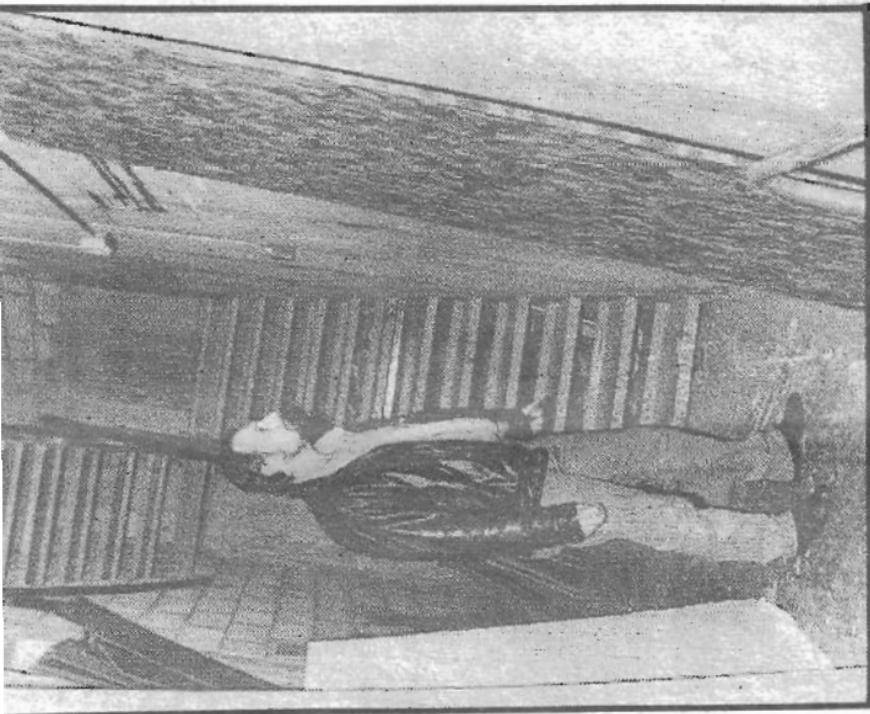
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"So there's no chance that she'll suddenly appear," I say with a degree of relief.

"No. I think she is finished here. She seems to be quite content. I think maybe she was disturbed when they built this Derrogate centre and came back just to check that everything was alright. But I don't think she'll be seen again," says Patrick.

"It's very hard to pick up anything definite — there's been so much activity here, the place has tremendous atmosphere and it's all good. Yeah, it's beautiful."

Just as we leave the town clock strikes midnight. We may not have seen the theatre's grey lady, but at least we came a little closer to finding out who she was. At least the theatre staff can rest assured that she won't be troubling them any more... until she walks again.



Patrick beside the old workshop

Fighting hastily for hens